



"GRAFT MUST GO!"

GLASS HOUSES

BY JAMES OPPENHEIM

WITH DRAWINGS BY W. C. RICE

UP to the time that Jack Black shot me I was merely an average American; since which time I've been an abnormal or exceptional one, according to your point of view. As my hindsight is getting unusually clear, I don't mind being utterly candid, although many will have no faith in my word. By average I mean clean of mind and body, cheerful, hard-working, democratic, willing to live and let live, and with good control over my emotions. I had a "cool head," a "warm heart," and could meet people on their own level. I had besides a love of fun and didn't believe in bothering my head over the sordid things. This mind cure theory, I think, will be found in the end to be a reflection of America in the early part of the twentieth century—a people who believed in laughter, success, wealth, health, comradeship, and who deliberately shut out from their minds all that was unpleasant. When I went to a play, I wanted it to be flip, sentimental,

impudent, dazzling. I had no use for tragic Shakespeare and vivisectioning Ibsen.

My start was a fine one on a Western farm. Life ran in a smooth routine of study and outdoor work until I began to shoot up into a lusty boy of sixteen. Then my parents sent me on to the University. I worked hard and played hard; I was good at football and at mathematics. I was popular among the boys and I kept straight—didn't smoke, gamble, drink, or riot around. Then I studied law—that Law of ours whose refrain is, "Property! property! property!" The more I studied it, the more satisfied I was to be a member of a civilization that so beautifully safeguarded a striving man, letting him keep, unmolested, all of the things that he gained, giving him the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—that is, to follow his own lead so long as he didn't steal or kill.

Then I went on down to the big city and

jumped into the great scramble. The city gets us all, because the city is the great skyscraping god Success, standing here and there in America, a cloud of smoke by day, a pillar of fire by night, hands out to the youth of the land, whispering: "Leave the smooth ruts; I have a heart of danger and battle; I demand all of you; I crush or I uplift to the skies; here you shall find the dramatic, the joyful, the splendid, and Power! I dare you to take me by storm!" And as healthy youth longs to try its muscles in flight, it takes the Limited and joins the swaying human tides of the shop-lit cañons.

And I came, too. My father had friends; I got a job with a good law firm—started at five a week. It used to thrill me to look out of that sky-scraper window over the vast spread of roofs, the bridges, the schools, the office buildings, and the far-off railway yards and the ship-black wharfs. I used to think: "Human beings created this. What power we have, we civilization-builders! It was human beings put up this sky-scraper—scaled the sky, laid beam by beam and stone by stone to unimaginable heights, and now in this enormous mass we tiny creatures calmly toil on the high floors and go up and down from street to sky as a daily matter of course." It made me feel that if others could achieve such greatness—build cities, track continents with railways, shrink the earth with "wireless"—then so could I. I'd shake my fist at the city and say: "I'm a speck of dust now, but wait! I'm going to shake you millions. I'm going to be one of your big men. Wait ten years."

So I set to work. I waited my chance; I won my first case; I began to be known round about; I joined the Republican Club; I toiled night and day and cut out the theater and the drawing-room. For I was on the first lap to success—which meant money, which meant power, which meant a man-size elbow-room, position, swift, unobstructed life, and *romance*. *Romance!* Napoleon or J. P. Morgan had the great lives—the god-power of realizing their dreams, playing with men, recasting civilization, fighting big powers. This was my young man's dream.

Things went swiftly, as they do in this land of young men. One of the big trust companies offered me the position of attorney. I took it. The salary was only ten thousand a year, but I soon doubled that. I was worth a mint to that company. If a law was passed that might hurt business, all I had to

do was to stay up one night, and in the morning I could show the Board of Directors how the law could be evaded. I rarely lost a case in court. If it was a jury case, I started by insulting, antagonizing, the judge, so that he might lose his temper and be manifestly unjust to me. This always gained the sympathy of the jury. I also learned how to be a righteous liar.

As to the ethics—well, I was too busy for ethics. Ethics takes time. A soldier in the thick of a battle hasn't the leisure to figure out whether or not he ought to stab a man in the back; he knows he must win or go down. May this not be one reason why our big Americans are moral-blind? It partly explains me; and ignorance and youth are partly accountable. And other things.

At any rate, life was simply ripping in those days. The name of Tolliver became known all over town—"the brilliant young corporation lawyer." It was certainly time to get married. I didn't hesitate. I went for Nancy Merivale, daughter of one of our directors. She seemed to fill the bill. She was stately, blue-eyed, and crowned with goldish hair, and, besides, she was simple and sensible. I think I loved her, in a way; at any rate, I admired and respected her; so I carried her by storm. Then I bought a big concrete house—English style—up on the Hill, got a couple of automobiles, and set up an American establishment. I think I was the usual chivalrous American husband. I wanted to go out and fight while Nancy stayed at home and played the Queen. I never troubled her with my business affairs, and so she was left alone with money and time to be spent. I was mightily proud of her. She was always well dressed and beautiful, and was a jewel in a parlor or at the theater. All she did all day was to have herself fixed up, glide about town in her electric runabout, do a little shopping, have afternoon tea or a headache, eat candy, and go to a show. As a result, it wasn't a year before she and I were worlds apart. We had nothing in common, and I grew busier and busier.

Then something happened to Nancy. Some new friend inveigled her into joining a Club. She came out for woman's suffrage, and she began to do Settlement work among the poor. When these things came to my ears, I asked her, brusquely:

"Nance, what does all this mean?"

"It means," she said—and there was a

new force about her manner—"that a woman has been given a brain, a heart, and a body as well as a man, and that if she doesn't use her gifts she will live a dead life. I want to *live*, Bert—as you do. I'm young, too."

I brushed all that aside. Women, of course, were not meant for such things and couldn't understand them.

"Nance," I said, "you're like all the rest. You take up with all the new fads. Want to help the poor, do you? Well, let me tell you that the minute you help people you turn them into paupers."

She tried to argue with me:

"I want to help them to help themselves. They are the victims of their environment—"

I laughed.

"Victims? Here in America every man has the chance to work his way up. Look at me. I mastered my environment. If a man doesn't succeed, it shows he's a good-for-nothing and better off where he is."

She turned pale then, and said nothing further; nor did I. I thought it best to let her work off her enthusiasm. The hard school of facts would teach her as it had taught me. But we saw less and less of each other.

And all this time I was driving on and on, getting bigger and bigger. And then a curious thing happened. Swinney, the Republican boss, asked me to run for District Attorney—said I was the man they all wanted—the public was beginning to howl about the street railway gang, they wanted reform.

"Bert," said Swinney, his fat hand on my shoulder and his left eye winking, "you're the man. You've got the crowd with you; you're young and a six-footer; if you ran around the old town and told the people you were going to wipe out this nest of grafters," he chuckled, "they'd sweep you into office with a broom. Otherwise, like as not some cock-eyed Socialist will get in and ruin business before we ousted him. We need a safe man who has never held office before."

I didn't want to do it. I had always felt contempt for the criminal lawyer. Ugh! to mix up with murder, burglary, and the lesser and larger crimes! Besides, I was very comfortable where I was. And I knew what Swinney was up to. He wanted me to get a public office and use it as a paid attorney for the corporations. I told Swinney no. Then came pressure: friends, politicians, the

Trust Company. Suddenly the best newspapers blossomed out with a Tolliver Boom. It was more than human nature could bear; I gave in, and was nominated.

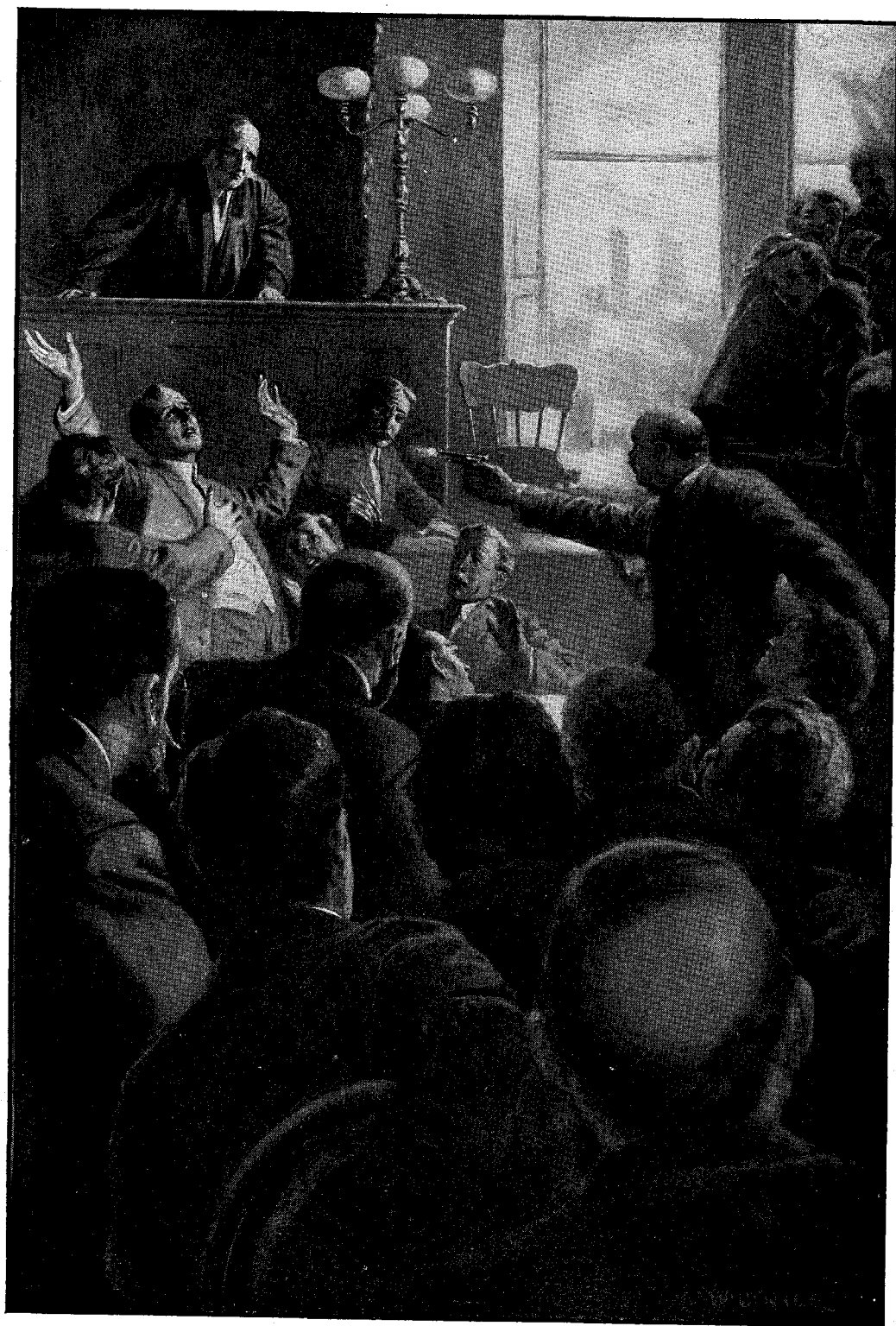
Then I began studying the Traction problem. A nice mess, that! The more I looked into it, the more interesting it became. It seemed that the Traction Company was owned by the big railway that ran into town; and it seemed quite evident that the railway owned the State—dictated legislation, appointed the judges, elected the Legislature, etc. In short, it seemed that the railway through its money controlled the political bosses, who in turn controlled the elections and the men elected. But this railway, I found, was owned by a bunch of Wall Street men back in New York, and these men seemed to have a grip on many things, on necessities of life, on banks, on money, and on the National Congress. So our poor little street car system was just a tiny tentacle of the Monster.

But what a tentacle! Inefficient service, overcrowding, double fares on transfer lines, blockades, bad ventilation, and a general "the-public-be-damned" policy. It was evident, too, that the company was trying to put through a perpetual franchise bill on new lines by bribing the City Council. This was the last straw; the city was on fire with reform.

Now I have never studied a problem without trying to find the answer. Purely as an intellectual exercise I looked for the solution of the Traction problem, and it seemed to me that all a man had to do was to jail the grafters and put honest men in office. That would clean up the city, and, if the example were followed, it would in the end clean up the United States.

This line of talk pleased me; it gave me my campaign material. I went from meeting to meeting maddening the people with my slogan, "Put the grafters in jail; put honest men in office!" I would work myself up to a great pitch of excitement, shake my fist, pour out a flood of facts, and cry my slogan into those eager faces, and the crowd would rise and yell, "Tolliver! Tolliver!" And I was caught in my own trap. A man can't say a thing over and over with his whole heart and soul without coming to believe what he says. I woke up one midnight, my brain in a fever; I shook Nancy out of her sleep.

"Nance," I said, drunkenly, "by heavens,



"I REMEMBER HOW SO EASILY HE STOOD UP, STILL SMILING,
FLIPPED A REVOLVER OUT AT ARM'S LENGTH, AND FIRED"

I'm going to raise Cain! *I'm going to put the grafters in jail!*"

She sat staring at me in the twilight which the lamp on the lawn made in the room. She laughed strangely.

"You've said that all along, Bert," she said. "Aren't you well?"

I wanted to go out and tell the whole world. I raised my voice.

"But I never meant it. Now I do. The city's rotten; I'm going to clean it up."

She came and put her arms about me.

"Oh, Bert, Bert," she was almost sobbing, "perhaps we can work it out yet—you and I!"

But I was too excited to attend to Nancy. I went to headquarters next day like a new man, on fire with righteousness. I was almost sick—pale, bloodshot eyes, fever up and down my body. And that night I made the speech of my life. I spoke like a religious prophet, like a man possessed by some higher power. I was an Isaiah waking the city to its sins and prophesying change. The crowd was awed, caught religion from me, and as I went from place to place the whole city was seized by a deadly new strength, a quiet frenzy—risen in one man of terrible purpose. Those days were thrilling; people grew pale when they talked politics.

And then Swinney came around.

"You're overdoing this, Tolliver," he said.

I rose.

"Overdoing it? I mean it, Swinney!"

He laughed.

"Oh, come, come—none of that!"

"Swinney," I said, "if I get into office, graft is going to go."

He was puzzled.

"If I thought we'd made a mistake in you—See here, boy, you've been overworking. You know well enough the worst Socialist couldn't do anything in office."

He seemed to think that I had gone insane. He argued with me, and my wrath rose and overflowed.

"Hell!" he yelled at last. "Stung us, eh? We'll cook your goose, young man—that we will!"

I knew what that meant. He would get out the whole organization against me; jam the polls with repeaters and floaters; bribe right and left; try to count me out. So I called in the reporters; I gave them the whole story, and the city had it in black headlines that afternoon. The whole city quivered with excitement; there were mass-

meetings, public parades, banners: "Stand by Tolliver!" "Graft Must Go!" It was an American demonstration of democratic power. And late that hushed election night the last of the news came in. The people had swept me into office.

My friends cut me right and left, cut Nancy too. Even her father held aloof. But my own folks sent me great letters. They seemed to understand back there on the farm. Nancy wanted to make a fuss of me, told me I was glorious, etc. But I was too busy to attend to her. I sailed right in, friends or no friends, and I was the darling of the people in those days.

Jack Black (they twisted his name about and called it the Black-Jack) was the leader in the Council. I camped on his trail. If any one got bribe money, he did. So I meant to bag him.

Dirty little criminal! He wasn't more than five feet four, with a little black hair on the back of his head, a wrinkled forehead, and sharp lines about his mouth and eyes. He had a shrewd, twinkling sort of face—the face of a "good sport." And, of course, he had "honor"—stood by his friends and was good to the poor. That made him all the more hateful, for he didn't a bit mind being a dirty tool for all the big grafters. Lord! the Black-Jack was even a philosopher—loved to speculate on the meaning of life and death, and I learned that he was a splendid man in his home, loved his wife and children, and so on.

It wasn't long before I got threats from the Traction bunch, and from Swinney's men and the men of the Trust Company. I was shown that if I "did anything," I would be "done for." The city, they told me, would be too hot for me to live in. They'd ruin me financially, socially, politically. What would I do after I finished my job? Did I think they would ever offer me another? Or could I practice law? Would any big business man engage me? And of course they did not believe that I meant business.

But I had good luck. I got after Edwin Kirke, who clerked for the Traction Company and did the actual dirty work of handing over money. Kirke was a decent, clean young fellow, and he had an itching conscience already. It didn't take much to win him over. The rest was easy. I had a stenographer and a couple of detectives behind the door with me in the Commercial Hotel, and when Kirke handed the Black-

Jack the money we broke in and nabbed the Councilman.

He was considerably shocked, but he was game. He thought it was quite a joke. Not so the city. There was a wild cry of bloody exultation; the man-hunters had cornered the man, the crowd wanted to taste blood. I've never seen such hate let loose in my life; I shared it myself; I was a demon in those days. My blood was up, too. We had one man, we wanted some more. So we bruited about a rumor of having a mass of facts—as indeed we had some in the conversation between Kirke and the Black-Jack, wherein the latter mentioned names—and a panic seized the Councilmen. They came into court to confess; they begged to be allowed to make a clean breast of it; one even got on his knees and sobbed his confession aloud. It seemed as if the Day of Judgment had come, and as if all the world were being remade. All the world except that devil the Black-Jack. He laughed in my face; told me I was young and callow, but that I'd learn in time, and said, mockingly:

"Bertie, you'll never put *me* in jail."

We swore in the Grand Jury; the case proceeded. And I knew I had that jury with me, and so did the Black-Jack. And I knew more—I had the city with me; I had the United States with me. By one blow I had shaken the whole continent; I had become famous; even New York spoke of Prosecutor Tolliver. Insurgent newspapers spoke of me as the "coming man," "Presidential timber." It seemed as if I had been sucked up by a cyclone and whirled to the top of things. And so, that snowy afternoon when I rose, to sum up the case for the people, and all the court-room was dead still, each man leaning forward with pale face, I spoke to the whole American people. Reporters scratched down my words that they might be wired out to eighty million souls. I spoke of the great times we lived in; I said the American people had risen to crush the criminal, to put the grafter where he belonged; I turned and pointed at the smiling Black-Jack.

"There," I cried, "you see before you the incarnate crime of our democracy; there—the Black-Jack—"

I remember how so easily he stood up, still smiling, flipped a revolver out at arm's length, and fired. My head seemed to explode; I had a horrid fright; an inquisitive pain

jabbed knives into a hundred parts of me; and in a queer surprise I smelled smoke and dropped a thousand feet into blackness.

Nancy was the first person I saw; and by then the surgeons had cut the bullet out of me. The ether made a strange change in me—a common effect. I felt like crying, like kissing, and I was in love with anything in human shape. So, with the tears streaming, I fondled Nancy's arm and kept murmuring:

"Ah, you're so sweet! ah, I love you!"

When the doctor looked in, I did the same to him, kissing his hand, which tasted of carbolic.

Nancy and I came very close together those days. I was weak as water and needed to be handled like a sick child. So her simple affection, her soft words, her sweet and anxious watchfulness, brought her for the first time into my heart of hearts.

Let who will explain it, but that shot made a great change in me. It took all the fight out of me. It was as if a bad boy had been spanked. I didn't ever want to go putting men into jail. Sensitive in every nerve of my body, I didn't want to hurt a fly, and the suffering of the men I was putting in prison haunted me. I even had a mad idea that I would give up the job of prosecutor. Through the long days and nights I lay on my back in that feeble and rather gentle condition, thinking, thinking.

What got me most was *Death*. When a fellow has a look into that, he gets some new thoughts. It struck me that life isn't a cut-and-dried affair, run by rule-of-thumb; but merely a little push-and-pull on a thin crust, and when the crust broke under our feet down we went into a Mystery. It made me feel unstable. What's the earth, tossed in unimaginable space and I flickering in a spot of it, that I should put any reliance on the little rules of our little game or that I should judge my fellow-men? Pitiable creatures! All of us to be sandbagged in the end, and yet what were we all trying to do? Why all this mauling and mutilating? Why not get together and have our few years of fun with each other? Surely these possibilities of love and happiness in our hearts were too precious to waste. And yet what a joy I had taken in breaking the criminal on the rack of Justice! There was a fire horror in the city; I saw it in the paper before Nancy could stop

me. Ninety young girls burned to death in a loft building; many jumped from the fifth-story windows. Stricken down, broken myself, in pain, I had a look into the life of the toilers. I saw that not all is well with the world, and I wondered whether putting a few grafters into jail was going to make all well.

And, looking back on my mad rush for success, I marveled at myself. Why had I been so greedy and vain? What was I after? Was it not just this that ailed my Nation? Every one struggling for himself, a city full of animals tearing and biting each other to get on top. And I thought of Jack Black and his wife and three children. Poor mut! I began to pity the little grafter. "What did he get?" I asked Nancy.

"Fifteen years," she said; "after they were sure you would live."

Fifteen years! Fifteen days in bed was torture to an active human being, and Jack must have been forty years old. Why in the world had he been a miserable grafter?

As soon as I was able to get out I went to see him. That visit is one of the things people can't explain. When the jailer saw that it was I, he was very considerate and let Jack Black be alone with me. He came in, in his prison stripes, his head shaven, his mustache gone, his back bent; but his eyes still twinkled. He looked at me critically as he stood before me.

"Sit down, Jack," I said.

So he sat down.

"You see," I went on, "you didn't do for me."

Jack smiled.

"You did for me, though."

I looked at him earnestly.

"I'm sorry it had to be—" I began.

He looked at me sharply, then he smiled.

"Tut! don't worry over me. There's a lot of human interest in this lock-up, and to an observer like myself it's all interesting," he went on in a philosophic strain. "Here every one is on the same level, and we've got a regular little Utopia. Here every man does his allotted share of work, as is the dream of the Socialist, and no man is higher than another by virtue of his station in life, his wealth, or his birth. All men here are equal, if not free. Why, I'll enjoy watching events here, and I know that all I see will help me to understand what is meant by Utopia."

"Utopia!" I put in. "What's that?"

"It's the day when we change the system, Tolliver."

"What system?"

"The system under which we live, that made you what you are, and me what I am. When you worked for the Trust people, you obeyed orders, didn't you?"

I felt very queer then.

"Yes, I did."

"Well, I guess you did some things that wouldn't bear the light of day."

I felt still queerer and a little humble before the man who shot me.

"Yes, I admit it."

"Well," he went on, "I obeyed orders, too. That's all. And the men higher up obey orders, too. It's the pressure of one on another; it's this system we call civilization. The difference between you and me, Tolliver, is that you did your work in legal phrases and I handled money. How about it?" He lowered his voice then and his eyes twinkled sharply. "And, after all your crooked business, you get so damned righteous and come after *us*! Do you wonder that I shot you?"

And then I saw at last. *We are all guilty*. Only we call our own thing *business*, and the other fellow's *graft*. I went home nearly sick again; I let Nancy put me in a chair and make a baby of me, but I told her:

"Nance, after this, we're going to face the music!"

And we did. The struggle nearly killed me. But how could I go on putting men into jail? As well sweep back the sea with a broom, as well cut the hair on a man's head and not expect it to grow again. If it came to jailing, I should have to bag the whole population. The conditions that made me a corporation lawyer made Jack Black a grafter, Swinney a crook, made Wall Street, the Trac-tion scandal—all! Surely there was only one thing to do—help change those conditions. But how? I didn't know. But I knew this: we must give the people back the American Government, we must give them direct legislation, and then when the people have the power they must use it to make the Great Change.

All very well; but had I not better keep my mouth closed and finish my job? After stirring up the animals in the name of righteousness, how could I quit? What could I say to an aroused city? What would they think me—their Isaiah, their Graft-Hound,

their Headliner? I asked Nancy, and then Nancy was revealed to me. She made me forget my little self. Suddenly it seemed to me that there had never been a greater age on earth than this one. Up and down the land swept that spirit that had touched my life, too. The American people were rising to their new opportunity. We were on the verge! on the verge!

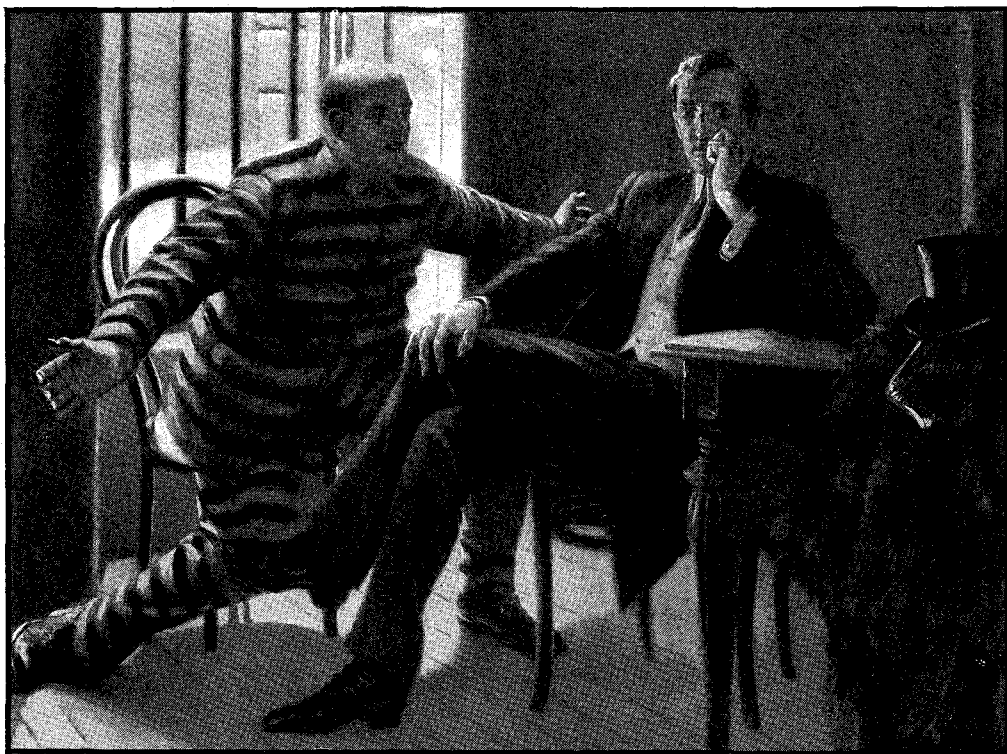
Wonderful new forces, new ideas, new tendencies, were in our eager hands. If only we had *world vision*, if only we saw that we must build a new state out of the

and flung her arms about me; her face was pale and she was trembling.

"Bert," she cried, "only a great man will publicly change his mind!"

We wrote the letter of resignation together—that letter that some thought maniacal, and others yellow—sent it late that night, called in the reporters in the morning. They couldn't believe the story; it scared them, and Nancy and I pulled out under the explosion.

I have some of the headlines before me: "Tolliver Turns Tail," "Is Tolliver a Coward?" "The Black-Jack's Victory," and,



"THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ME AND YOU, TOLLIVER, IS THAT YOU DID YOUR WORK IN LEGAL PHRASES, AND I HANDLED MONEY"

chaos of the old, a new civilization of health, industry, co-operation, joy.

Before this issue I shrank into nothingness. I could not go on destroying twigs of the dying tree while all hands were needed in planting the new tree. I had to leave leadership in the Old America to join the ranks of the New America.

"But, Nancy," I said, "can you bear it—the disgrace, the fresh start in some other city (I'll be only a lawyer there), and no automobiles, no house full of servants?"

She had been looking out the window at the respectable Hill. She came flying to me

worst of all, "Who Bought Bert Tolliver?" With faces white and our arms round each other, Nancy and I read some of these things in the taxi that sunny morning, but at the station only a few knew us, and they turned and walked away. As the train left the great city behind and speeded over the long plains, we sat and looked out on a new life.

The renewing springs of life are everywhere gushing—one cannot breathe the air of the times without inhaling a tense expectancy. On the verge! In every direction a break, an advance, the freshness of early morning, the meeting of comrades.

